



NPDB-HIPDB



DATA BANK NEWS



National Practitioner Data Bank—Healthcare Integrity and Protection Data Bank

JANUARY 2005

IQRS Bolsters Security In April 2005

Ensuring data security to maintain confidentiality during the receipt, storage, and disclosure of practitioner reports is a priority at the Data Banks. In keeping with this priority and in response to Federal data security requirements, more stringent password security procedures for the Integrated Querying and Reporting Service (IQRS) are scheduled for implementation in April 2005.

The security measures will establish a new set of requirements for Data Bank users with regard to the IQRS password procedures. These procedures will enhance system security for information stored in the NPDB-HIPDB (as well as reduce the risk of unauthorized access to user accounts). The April 2005 improvements will increase administrator password restrictions, minimize the use of common or easily guessed passwords, and tighten password expiration rules.

IQRS PASSWORD EXPIRATION

IQRS users will be required to change their passwords every 90 calendar days.

The user will receive an expiration notice 5 days prior to the expiration. After a password has expired, a user will be granted one (1) grace login, which can be used up to 30 calendar days after the password expiration. If the password is not changed within the 30 days, the user's account will be locked out of the IQRS. Please see the Resetting Passwords section below for instructions on how to access the IQRS. *Currently, prior to April 2005, IQRS users are required to change their passwords every 180 days and have an indefinite period in which to use the grace login.*

RESETTING PASSWORDS

If a user forgets his or her password or is locked out of the IQRS, the administrator is responsible for resetting the password. The administrator will provide a system-generated, temporary password for the user. This password is valid for three (3) calendar days. The user is required to change this password upon the next IQRS login. There is no grace login once this temporary password expires. *Currently, prior to*

Inside this issue:

IQRS Bolsters Security In April 2005	1
New Name for NPDB-HIPDB Governing Agency.....	1
Coming Soon: The Querying and Reporting XML Service (QRXS).....	2
View Data Bank Correspondence!	3
Helpful Hints from the Data Banks.....	4
Pro-Active Disclosure Service (PDS) Considered.....	5
Dear Data Banks	7
Data Bank Meeting Summaries....	7
On the Horizon	8

April 2005, the administrator can select the user's password and that password is valid for 180 days. The user has an indefinite period in which to use the grace login and is not required to change the password upon the next IQRS login. In April 2005, administrators will no longer have access to user passwords. This improvement helps secure the privacy of user passwords.

If the administrator forgets the IQRS password or is locked out of the IQRS, he

*See **IQRS Bolsters Security In April 2005** on page 4*

New Name for NPDB-HIPDB Governing Agency: Practitioner Data Banks Branch (PDBB)

In September 2004, the Bureau of Health Professions (BHP) of the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) reorganized and renamed the former Division of Practitioner Data Banks (DPDB) to the Practitioner Data Banks Branch (PDBB) of the Office of Workforce Evaluation and Quality Assurance (OWEQA). The PDBB is the government agency responsible for administering the Data Banks. Matters dealing specifically with legal interpretation of statutory and regulatory authority should be directed to: Branch Chief, PDBB, 7519 Standish Place, Suite 300, Rockville MD 20857. Other matters, including requests for general information about the Data Banks, should continue to be directed to: NPDB-HIPDB, P.O. Box 10832, Chantilly, VA 20153-0832 (4094 Majestic Lane, PMB-332, Fairfax, VA 22033 for overnight delivery services). ¶

Coming Soon: The Querying and Reporting XML Service (QRXS)

Beginning January 31, 2005, the Data Banks will offer a new Extensible Markup Language (XML) reporting and querying interface as an option to users. The new interface will be called the Querying and Reporting XML Service (QRXS). QRXS will improve the exchange of data between users and the Data Banks by providing an industry-standard format for query and report data exchange. Initially, use of the QRXS will be limited to submitting Adverse Action Reports (AARs). Querying

and submission of Medical Malpractice Payment Reports and Judgment or Conviction Reports are scheduled as future enhancements later in 2005. Of course, entities can continue using the Integrated Querying and Reporting Service (IQRS) or the Interface Control Document (ICD) Transfer Program (ITP) for querying and reporting.

QRXS is an electronic service similar to ITP for reporters who wish to interface their data processing system directly with the Data Banks to submit reports and receive responses. As

with ITP, QRXS users can customize the Data Banks' response files in the format that the user desires, such as Microsoft Excel or another third-party format. For users of the IQRS, response information is sent back in Portable Document Format (PDF).

QRXS provides a stand-alone client program that transmits files containing report data to, and receives response files from, the Data Banks. For added security, the data will be transmitted over a Secure Socket Layer (SSL) connection. The QRXS client can be run as a

Continued on page 3

OPTIONS FOR QUERYING AND REPORTING TO THE DATA BANKS

	IQRS	ITP	QRXS
HOW QUERY AND REPORT DATA IS FORMATTED	User manually enters query and report data on-line.	User creates software to format query and report data in ITP format.	User creates software to format query and report data in XML format.
HOW VALIDATION IS PERFORMED AND HOW REJECTION IS COMMUNICATED TO USER	If query or report data is missing or incomplete, on-line validation notifies user prior to submission.	If query or report data is missing or incomplete, user must submit transaction and wait 4 to 6 hours for rejection response.	User can validate that the XML transactions are correctly formatted prior to submission using XML schemas provided by the Data Banks. The QRXS will provide a real-time response to submissions that are incorrectly formatted or contain incomplete or missing data.
OUTPUT	Query and report responses are returned in PDF file(s) which can be saved, scanned, or printed.	Query and report results are returned in the ITP format. The user creates software to parse and load the response into the user's corporate systems or format the results as desired.	Query and report results are returned in the XML format. The user creates software to parse and load the response into the user's corporate systems or format the results as desired.

Figure 1. The three options for querying and reporting to the Data Banks are outlined above.

Coming Soon: The Querying and Reporting XML Service (QRXS)... continued from page 2

stand-alone program or under the control of other programs. An Application Programming Interface (API) is available for additional flexibility when integrating QRXS transactions into existing software systems. The QRXS will offer advantages to high-volume Data Bank users, who particularly benefit when submitting a large number of reports to the Data Banks.

QRXS will offer additional advantages over ITP, such as:

- QRXS uses industry-standard XML.
- QRXS client program includes an optional API.
- The Data Banks-defined XML schema and third-party XML validating software ensures QRXS report submission files are formatted correctly before submission.
- QRXS provides a real-time rejection response.

- QRXS supports clients that use proxy servers.

For a comparison of all three methods of querying and reporting (IQRS, ITP and QRXS), see Figure 1 (on page 2) entitled "Options for Querying and Reporting to the Data Banks."

For more information on the QRXS, check www.npdb-hipdb.com/qrxs.html, a new web page that will be available January 31, 2005. When visiting this web page, users will find information including:

1. The QRXS distribution package (zip file) containing the client program and documentation for the API.
2. The XML schema files (zip file).
3. The QRXS AAR ICD (in PDF format).
4. The sample XML submission and response files (zip file).

5. The QRXS Client Program User Guide (in PDF format), containing information on:

- Installation (system requirements, software requirements, and software installation).
- Client configuration and execution.
- The API.

On www.npdb-hipdb.com/qrxs.html, QRXS users will be able to add their contact information to the QRXS Mailing List, for advance notification of QRXS updates and specification documents. The web page and mailing list will be available January 31, 2005.

Please look for information regarding QRXS enhancements in future issues of *NPDB-HIPDB Data Bank News*. ¶

View Data Bank Correspondence!

The Integrated Querying and Reporting Service (IQRS) Data Bank Correspondence feature conveys important messages to users and administrators. Beginning in April 2005, it will be easier to view new Data Bank Correspondence messages. The *Registration Confirmation* screen will display new Data Bank Correspondence messages on-screen immediately after the user logs in to the IQRS. Previously read Data Bank Correspondence messages will remain available for 30 days on the *Data Bank Correspondence* screen for review. Thereafter, the IQRS will automatically delete 30-day-old messages. ¶

IQRS Bolsters Security in April 2005 from page 1

or she must call the Customer Service Center at 1-800-767-6732 to reset the password. The Customer Service Center will provide a system-generated, temporary password for the administrator. This password is valid for three (3) calendar days. The administrator is required to change this password upon his or her next IQRS login. There is no grace login once this temporary password expires. *Currently, prior to April 2005, entity administrators are required to change their passwords every 180 days and have an indefinite period in which to use the grace login.*

GENERATED PASSWORDS

Passwords mailed to newly registered entities on entity registration confirmation documents are sent via U.S. mail and will be valid for 30 calendar days from the mailing date. The entity administrator is required to change this password upon his or her next IQRS login. There is no grace login once this temporary password expires. These improvements secure the privacy of the entity administrator's password. *Currently, prior to April 2005, the passwords sent to new entities on entity registration confirmation documents are valid for 180 days and entities have an indefinite period in which to use the grace login. The passwords are not required to be changed upon the next IQRS login.* For a comparison of the current IQRS security features and the enhanced April 2005 security features, see the Password Security Comparison Chart on page 6.

MINIMIZE THE USE OF COMMON OR EASILY GUESSED PASSWORDS

A Data Bank password must contain at least eight characters (letters and symbols) and must include at least one number. In

April 2005, the Data Banks will prohibit the use of common or easily guessed passwords by applying the following password restrictions:

- Password must not contain a word found in the dictionary.
- Password must not be a common Data Bank phrase (e.g., NPDB, IQRS).
- Password must not be your User ID.
- Password must not be a simplistic or systematic sequence (e.g., abcd1234).

These password restrictions improve password integrity and security for the system. If a user attempts to set a commonly used or weak password, a system error displays, indicating that the password does not comply with the password policy. For example, the password "doctors1" will not be acceptable after April 2005, because it is based on a dictionary word and is easy to guess and generate. A better choice is "+doc1TORS!", which uses mixed case and symbols. Another example of a bad choice for a password is "aaaaa123", which contains too few different characters and a simple sequence (commonly exploited password weaknesses). A better choice is "aAAaa!2#", which uses the same sequence but uses mixed-case characters and symbols.

For more information on the importance of IQRS security, and for additional guidelines on establishing a secure password, see the article entitled "Ensure IQRS Security," located in the July 2004 issue of *NPDB-HIPDB Data Bank News*, available on-line at

See IQRS Bolsters Security In April 2005 on page 6

Helpful Hints From

CLICK "VIEW QUERY RESPONSE" TO AVOID DUPLICATE QUERIES AND CHARGES!

To avoid sending a possible duplicate query and incurring duplicate charges, find out if your query was successfully submitted. Log in to the Integrated Querying and Reporting Service (IQRS) and select **View Query Response** on the *Options* screen to see if the query you submitted is marked "Pending" or "Completed." If the query is marked "Pending" or "Completed," then it was received by the Data Banks and does not need to be re-submitted. The results are usually returned within 4-6 hours after being submitted.

UPDATE YOUR ENTITY PROFILE AS OFTEN AS NECESSARY

Remember to update your entity profile when significant changes occur within your organization (e.g., in the event of a merger or acquisition, location change, or point of contact change). The administrator of an entity or agent should report profile changes on-line through the IQRS. After logging in to the IQRS, select **Update Profile** on the *Administrator Options* screen to update your entity's profile information.

Pro-Active Disclosure Service (PDS) Considered

The Data Banks are currently exploring the feasibility of offering a Pro-Active Disclosure Service (PDS) to respond to new accreditation standards in the health community and to provide increased value to Data Banks customers. If implemented, PDS will notify a registered entity automatically when the Data Banks receive new reports on practitioners that the entity has enrolled in the PDS. Registered entities that subscribe to the optional PDS will be alerted to new reports on a roster of practitioners they submit to the Data Banks. The PDS will automatically notify registered entities of reports on their enrolled practitioners between regular querying periods.

PDS could improve an entity's health care quality by substantially reducing the time between the Data Banks' receipt of a subject report and the interested entity's notification of that report. If implemented, PDS will be an optional service. Current Data Banks functionality and query process will not change with the addition of PDS.

Over the past year, the Data Banks conducted outreach and held a series of user feedback meetings with current Data Banks users to discuss the benefits of a potential PDS. These meetings were conducted in various cities across the nation to measure user interest and the potential PDS features that would work best for Data Banks users.

The first round of discussion groups occurred in spring 2003, when the Data Banks solicited information on the PDS concept in several select regions nationwide with a diverse group of NPDB-HIPDB customers. The discussion groups consisted of approximately 6-11 participants each in 11 different cities across the United States. The meetings focused on several options: PDS delivery method, fee structure, and participant customized systems. The Data Banks are using this information to identify the PDS features that would best address the requirements for ongoing monitoring of practitioners.

The second round of discussion groups took place from September to October 2004 in five cities, and each group consisted of approximately 20 participants. The participants in each city were provided with an overview of the PDS and its potential attributes based on the first round of discussions. The participants provided useful information to the Data Banks on PDS pricing, enrollment, and subscription alternatives.

If approved and implemented, the PDS would not replace current Data Bank querying methods, but would become an enhancement to Data Bank functionality. No decisions have been made regarding the implementation of this service. The Data Banks will provide more information about a potential PDS in future issues of *NPDB-HIPDB Data Bank News*. ¶

The Data Banks

IMPORT XML-FORMAT SUBJECT DATA INTO YOUR SUBJECT DATABASE

Since November 15, 2004, IQRS users are able to import subject information using Extensible Markup Language (XML) format (previously only fixed-width format was accepted). Importing subject information using XML offers advantages, such as the ability to update and delete subject information in your subject database. To read about the advantages of XML and view other related information (format instructions and sample format files), go to www.npdb-hipdb.com/iqrsSubjectDatabase.html.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE DATA BANKS!

The NPDB and HIPDB Interactive Training Programs are valuable tools for helping IQRS users understand NPDB and HIPDB policy. To access the two interactive programs, click the Interactive Training link under the Quick List heading on the right side of the home page. An interactive quiz for each Data Bank describes more than 50 scenarios about medical malpractice payments, adverse license actions, adverse clinical privilege actions, adverse membership actions, other adjudicated actions, health care-related criminal convictions and civil judgments, and exclusions. This program clearly identifies which actions are reportable to the Data Bank(s) and why. All NPDB and HIPDB users are encouraged to use these training programs. ¶

IQRS Bolsters Security in April 2005... continued from page 4

www.npdb-hipdb.com/pubs/newsletter/July_2004_Newsletter.pdf. Also, watch for an upcoming newsletter section entitled "Security Hints from the Data Banks," available in *NPDB-HIPDB Data Bank News* beginning April 2005.

The Federal laws and regulations governing Data Bank data security may be reviewed at www.npdb-hipdb.com/legislation.html. ¶

PASSWORD SECURITY COMPARISON CHART

GENERAL PASSWORDS		
POLICY	CURRENT POLICY	New APRIL 2005 POLICY
Password Expiration	Must Change Password Every 180 Calendar Days	Must Change Password Every 90 Calendar Days
Password Expiration Notice	Notice is Displayed 5 Calendar Days Prior to Password Expiration	Notice is Displayed 5 Calendar Days Prior to Password Expiration
Grace Login Period After Password Expires	Grace Login is Valid Indefinitely After Password Expires	Grace Login is Valid Within 30 Calendar Days After Password Expires
NEW ENTITY PASSWORDS		
POLICY	CURRENT POLICY	New APRIL 2005 POLICY
Password Expiration	Must Change Password Within 180 Calendar Days	Must Change Password Within 30 Calendar Days (to Allow Time for Registration Document to Reach the Entity)
Does Entity Have to Change Password After First Use?	No	Yes
Grace Login Period After Password Expires	Grace Login is Valid Indefinitely After Password Expires	<u>No Grace Login</u> After Password Expires
RESET PASSWORDS		
POLICY	CURRENT POLICY	New APRIL 2005 POLICY
Password Expiration	Must Change Password Within 180 Calendar Days	Must Change Password Within 3 Calendar Days
Does Entity Have to Change Password After First Use?	Administrator: Yes User: No	Administrator: Yes User: Yes
Grace Login Period After Password Expires	Grace Login is Valid Indefinitely After Password Expires	<u>No Grace Login</u> After Password Expires

Figure 2. The Password Security Comparison Chart illustrates current and future security regulations for the IQRS.

Dear Data Banks...

This column answers questions you may have about Data Bank policy and procedures. If you have a question about how the Data Banks work, please write to Dear Data Banks at P.O. Box 10832, Chantilly, VA 20153-0832 or e-mail your question to Dear Data Banks at npdb-hipdb@sra.com. We look forward to hearing from you!

Question: A physician's application for surgical privileges is denied because the physician is not board certified in a particular clinical specialty or subspecialty. Is this action reportable to the NPDB?

Answer: If the institution has established a threshold eligibility standard that practitioners must be board certified to be granted privileges, then the denial of privileges is not reportable. However, if there is no blanket eligibility policy but a professional review decision was made that this particular applicant should not be granted privileges because he or she is not board certified, then the action is reportable.

Question: May self-queries be used to satisfy requirements for peer review and employment?

Answer: Subjects may share the information contained in their own self-query responses with whomever they choose; however, such shared information does not satisfy a hospital's legal requirement to query the NPDB whenever a physician, dentist, or other health care practitioner applies for clinical privileges or a medical staff appointment. Organizations that have an obligation to query (e.g., hospitals) must still meet their querying

obligations. **Note:** Entities that can query but are not required to query should be aware of the risk of relying on self-query responses submitted by practitioners. Please be advised that a Data Bank response can only truly be relied on if it is received directly from the Data Banks. The Data Banks are aware of instances in which practitioners have attempted to alter or forge self-query results prior to providing them to insurers, boards, or health care entities.

Question: Can I designate more than one authorized agent to query for my hospital?

Answer: Yes. To designate one or more authorized agents to query for your hospital, the entity's administrator logs in to the Integrated Querying and Reporting Service (IQRS) and selects **Administrator Options** on the *Entity Registration Confirmation* screen. The administrator selects **Maintain Agent Information** on the *Administrator Options* screen, clicks **Add** on the *Agent Information* screen, and completes all fields on the *Designate Authorized Agent* screen. The administrator certifies the information and clicks **Continue**. The administrator will see a formatted copy of the Agent Designation Request, which should be printed for the entity's records. The entity's administrator should then notify the authorized agent's administrator to log in to the IQRS to accept this request.

If you have an urgent question, please call the Customer Service Center at 1-800-767-6732. Information Specialists are available to speak with you weekdays from 8:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. (5:30 p.m. on Fridays) Eastern Time. The Customer Service Center is closed on all Federal holidays. ¶

Data Bank Meeting Summaries

The Integrated Querying Reporting Service (IQRS) User Review Panel (URP) convened on October 19, 2004, in Fairfax, Virginia. Periodically, the URP meeting has been held in different locations around the United States, and serves as a forum for users to provide feedback about Data Bank operations. This year's forum included participants from Connecticut, the District of Columbia, Florida, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Tennessee, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. The URP meetings have proven to be important in collecting data as well as providing suggestions on how to improve the system. Topics discussed at the recent meeting included:

- Recent System Improvements.
- Future System Improvements.
- A Possible Pro-Active Disclosure Service (PDS).
- The Necessity for Increased System Security.
- Section 1921 – Integration into the NPDB.

The Data Banks strive to ensure that the IQRS remains a valuable and user-friendly system. User feedback and suggestions received during this meeting are currently being considered by the Data Banks for future system enhancements.

The NPDB Executive Committee Meeting met November 16, 2004 at the Sheraton Crystal City Hotel in Arlington, VA. The Committee is composed of representatives of major NPDB constituents, including federations of licensing boards, professional societies, medical malpractice organizations, consumer groups, accrediting bodies, and other NPDB stakeholders.

The Committee provides guidance to the NPDB contractor, SRA International, Inc. The next Executive Committee meeting is scheduled for May 12, 2005 in Arlington, VA. ¶

On the Horizon

NEWSLETTER DEBUTS SECURITY HINTS COLUMN IN APRIL 2005

In spring 2005, *NPDB-HIPDB Data Bank News* will feature a new column, "Security Hints from the Data Banks," highlighting important security information and recommendations to help entities ensure that Data Bank information remains secure. We'll review current security issues and discuss ways to keep the data safe.

UPDATE YOUR BROWSER

On January 31, 2005, the Data Banks will upgrade the browser versions supported in the Integrated Querying Reporting Service (IQRS) to include Internet Explorer versions 6.0, 6.0 SP1, and 6.0 SP2. In addition, supported Netscape versions will be upgraded to include 7.02, 7.1, and 7.2. Please ensure that your computer's Internet browser version is supported by the IQRS. 🏥

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